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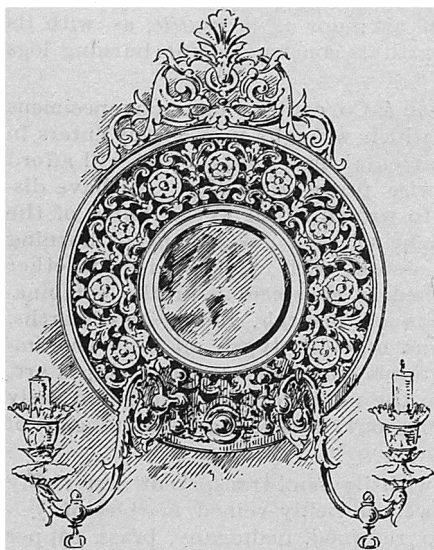
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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

WROUGHT IRON INTERIOR EMBELLISHMENTS.

BY JAMES CARRUTHERS.



THE hand obedient to the direction of the mind is the most perfect agent of artistic power. Its full subtlety, however, is only shown when one works on or with what is entirely yielding. The hand of the sculptor may be as subtle as the painter's, but owing to the resistance of the marble he cannot render it fully expressive of his æsthetic conception as the artist with his bending point of hair pencil and the soft blending of colors.

The ductility and tenacity of iron renders it an admirable vehicle for effective design, such as is in harmony with its characteristics, and, accordingly, artistic wrought-iron work has always been regarded as representative of the taste and skill of the period in which it was produced. There is a vast difference between cast and wrought iron, the forms presented by the former being utterly unsuited for the latter, and wholly incapable of the same refinements, whether in sharp outlines or undulating forms. In the case of wrought iron, the hammering at the anvil so disposes of the molecular particles as to alter its essential properties, including an addition of

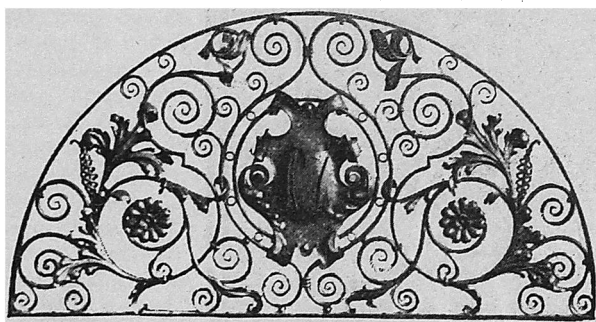


FIG. 1.

strength and solidity. The skilled designer in wrought iron aims at combining a certain simplicity with a high degree of picturesqueness, the rich and beautiful traceries of mediæval times, and the forgings of the 15th and 16th centuries, which illustrate all the problems and difficulties of ornamental work, are still properly regarded with admiration. It was reserved for the armorers of 16th century in their embossed and chiselled work, to bring the art to the highest point of perfection. This art allied itself to architecture in its successive periods of transition in the way of crochets, finials, escutcheons, window traceries, canopies, screens, grilles and door embellishments, embodying at times the most

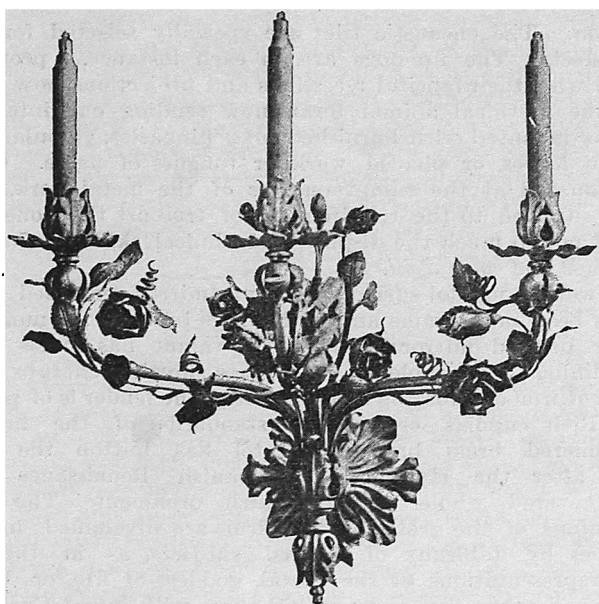


FIG. 2.

capricious fancies, at others taking a flamboyant style but asserting throughout its capacity for artistic expression, indicating not only the full conception of the designer, but the delight of the smith in embodying its spout. Evidence of delicacy of feeling is traceable in branches as they grow into elaborate and graceful circling coils, in spindle works, in leaves, flowers and other embellishments in the standards of torch-holders, in screen work, mantels, grates, fire clogs and andirons, in hinge flanges of doors and chests, at once strengthening and beautifying them in the elaborate ornamentation of locks and key handles, even in candlesticks of delicate execution and appropriate forms, all showing that wrought iron artistically treated has an æsthetic beauty of its own.

The starting point of composition is construction suitable to the material and its purpose—ornamental features growing out of the essential structural parts, and so displaying freedom, plasticity and variety. The best periods of wrought iron art were not those in which playful elegance of design and indulgence of grotesque caprices were more regarded than the inherent



FIG. 3.

fitness of the material as to forms so as to secure consistency as a whole.

Great credit is due to the firm of Messrs. Jackson & Co., of Union Square, New York, for bringing decorative embellishments in wrought iron to a point that will certainly redound to the reputation of the present epoch in the future, for wrought iron is as enduring as brass. The designs possess that individuality—that evidence of purposed intention as to the precise effects to be brought out, of good planning on known principles well supported by technical skill that characterized wrought iron productions in the best periods of the art, and this with uniformly picturesque effects. In all the varied outlines of mantels, grates, fenders, and lamps to be seen in their show-rooms, there is a symmetry of parts, a unity of expression, a consistency of style, preference for picturesque outline rather than ornamental details, whilst a perfect balance is maintained in each instance between the separate forms combined with high finish.

In Fig. 1 we furnish the view of a grille or screen falling the upper part of an arch. An armorial bearing occupies the

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center from which emerge encircling scrolls, flanked on each side by other scrolls with lesser scrolls springing out of them, with conventionalized flowers in the interspaces, the whole being riveted to the bordering car. The whole has been built up scroll by scroll and leaf by leaf. The design is so managed as to convey the idea of strength and harmony.

Fig. 2 is a view of a sconce, combining purity of style and exquisite beauty of form. A nicety of precision is evinced in the details. The central stem, with rich cluster of leaf and buds, springs from a mass of deep veined leaves. The extended branches are enriched with leaves, flowers and tendrils. The leaves are of sheet iron beaten out cold and then welded. Although elaborate in details these are clearly defined, and each part appears an essential part of the design. There is a certain massing of the ornaments in accord with the characteristics of such metal work which secure, as an aid to the effect of such a sconce, compact shadows with clear outlines. Any complicated broken shadows are essentially wrong.

Fig. 3 is a superb, wrought iron, hanging lamp, suitable for a large hall, made by the above firm. Abundant as is the ornament it is subservient to the form. The lower frame-work is crested with bold and elegant scrolls with leaf adornments, the interstices being filled in with spiral-like threads of metal; the pendant is formed by an open spindle from beneath the shield of which spring simulated flowers, composed of cup and spindle,

of appropriately massive construction, the line of front being varied on each side by a recess ending in richly ornamented bases which respectively support urns hung with garlands of a highly monumental aspect. Such a fireplace would not fail to adorn the most handsomely furnished room. It is a tableau instinct with the vitality of art; nor is it *inutile*, as with its huge simulated logs the hearth is constructed for burning logs or admitting warm air.

The show-rooms of Jackson & Co. contain numerous specimens of mantels and grates into which wrought iron largely enters in combination with other ornamental materials, such as will afford effective contrasts or otherwise prove attractive. All have distinctive features pertaining to wrought iron work. Some of the grates are constructed for lighting with gas, others for burning coal. Brass, which so well assorts with wrought iron whether the surface is plain or polished, is conspicuous in the combination; so, too, tiles for facias of mantels, lining and hearths. While none are reduplications of older types, all bear the impress of the designs being worked out in the spirit of classic art, combined and modified, as in the period of the Italian and early French Renaissance, with the untrammelled artistic fancies of the designers.

We find Mexican onyx, with its semi-transparent and richly variegated figures, used, as well as richly veined marbles of yellowish tinge, as adjuncts to redwood, mahogany, brass, copper

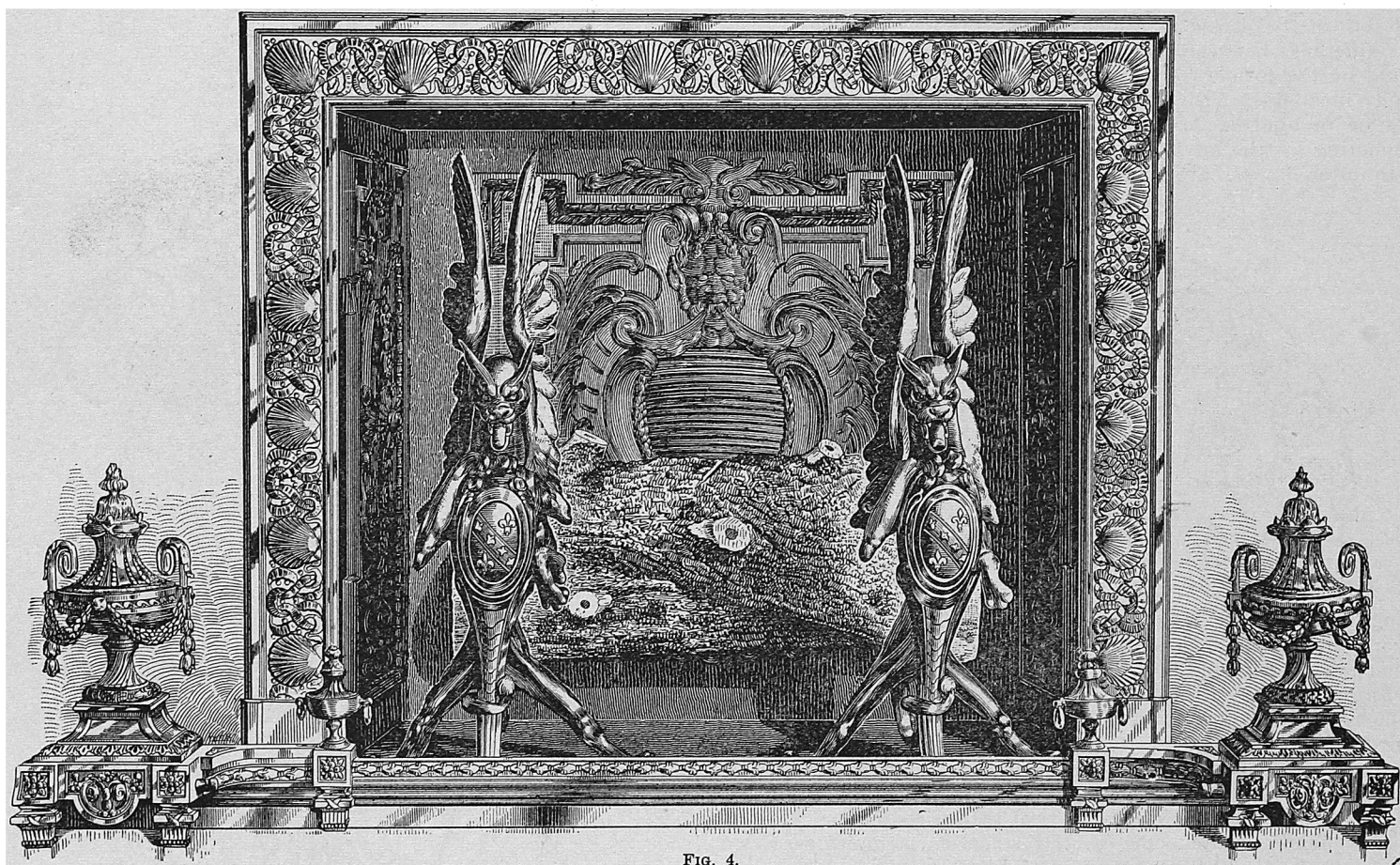


FIG. 4.

around converging curves that form the stem of the lamp, and are in contrast to the light adornment beneath.

The scrolls cresting the structural angles of the top of lamp, with many outgrowths and circling projections, leaves and other ornaments are finely conceived, connected with chains, the links of which display irregular facets, the whole crowned by a rich mass of interlaced curves.

It will be observed that none of the ornamental adjuncts are independent. There is a vigor about the leaved scrolls that is suggestive of the laws of growth. The fine play of light and shade on the multiplicity of curved lines will show to the fullest advantage the beauty of the outline.

The accompanying view of wrought iron fireplace, also by Messrs. Jackson & Co., offers a superb example of Renaissance design during its best development in Italy and France. The frame, as will be seen, consists of shells and runic knots in repoussé and alternating, bordered by a projecting band. The lining is of metal, enriched at back with symbolic head of Vesta, goddess of fire, surmounting a masque of Vulcan or Pluto. Beneath is a figurative representation of a basket made of welded bars flanked by scroll work suggestive of leaping flames. The fire-dogs, of legendary significance, with shield in front and uplifted wings, and with hoof-like supports, all of beaten metal, presents a stimulating and graphic appearance. The fender is

and iron. The encaustic tiles are specially selected for their color effects. The fire-dogs are, in each instance, a prominent feature with their fanciful recessions and projections, now enclosing some mythical animal form, now sending out interlacing shots, or mounted with burnished brass pinnacles, globular forms of open leaves, or pierced work or tongues of flame. One is fairly amazed at the sumptuousness of the metal work, which yet so subdued to the requirements of true art that one is impressed not so much the display of technical skill as what may be termed the *coup d'œil*.

A walnut mantel surmounted by a mirror, enriched with a broken bead brass frame and with wings built up; a number of smaller beveled mirrors paneled in walnut has brass plated metal linings, with tableaux over grate showing cherubs among masses of iron ore, forging arrow heads. The fender is of polished iron. Rich cupolas crown the standards of the fire-dogs. A hammered brass bronzed mantel has button tile copper lining after the style of the Spanish Renaissance which style covered whole surfaces with ornament. The metal fire linings of the grates of the firm are diversified in some instances by tableaux of figured subjects, as in the symbolic representations of the Vestal, goddess of fire, or Vulcan, Pluto, and other fire gods of old time, with infant Cyclopeans forging weapons.